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AUTHOR Sheppard, N. Alan
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ABSTRACT

The administrator can be a facilitator or stimulator of research in the schools by taking the initiative in getting local school personnel and board members to see the value of educational research, leading the fight for earmarking research money, encouraging and assisting boards in providing release time for teachers to become actively engaged in meaningful research, facilitating collaboration between college and public school faculty, encouraging and assisting public school teachers via inservice workshops in becoming more knowledgeable in research methodology or philosophy in relation to some of their day-to-day classroom problems and concerns, and bringing about the reality of research within the organizational life breath of the school. (Author/IRT)

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[1]The Role of Educational Administrators in School Based Research

INTRODUCTION

This afternoon's symposium will focus on the role of educational administrators in school based research. It will look at the administrator's involvement in research from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Further, it will look at the school administrator's responsibilities to solve problems and resolve conflicts as well as providing leadership and direction for the school system. Further still, the symposium will focus on administrators' attitudes toward providing the leadership necessary for sound and rational decision making undergirded by school based research. Finally, the symposium will examine the need to restructure the delivery system which makes educational research expertise available to schools.

Participating with me in this symposium this afternoon are: Dr. Ann Bush, Assistant Superintendent of the Philadelphia School System (PA); Dr. Pederson representing the superintendent of the Richmond City School System, Dr. Richard Hunter; Dr. Robert Frary, of VPI & SU; and, finally Dr. Dave Kapel, University of Nebraska at Omaha (Nebraska).

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[1]This paper was presented by N. Alan Sheppard, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare at the AERA Convention for Researchers for action in Toronto, Canada, March 27, 1978.

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Researchers for action as a SIG group is dedicated to action or on the job research. In other words it is a type of applied research undertaken by educational practitioners in order to solve practical problems, and improve their practices in the school or community setting. This is a praraphrase version comparable to that of Corey, 1953, Worthington, 1965; and Skoprowski, 1972. Similar to other types of research action research adheres to three basic procedures:

(1) Defining the problem (hypotheses).
(2) Developing an approach (method) to collect, organize and analyze data.
(3) Generalizing only on the basis of the data collected.

ADMINISTRATORS SEEN AS THE KEY

If action research is to manifest itself at the public school level, then it is the educational administrator of that school that will key that movement. How do educational administrators perceive their role in educational research?

"Every educational administrator (superintendents, principals, etc.) is an active researcher. As a consumer and producer of action research, each educational administrator makes his or her school a learning laboratory which reflects the surrounding school community and all it has to offer."

If a test on Educational Awareness were constructed, asking if the foregoing statement were true -- the right answer would probably be NO. No it's not true.

No, educational administrators are not really researchers. Moreover school administrators are not really expected to be researchers by anyone. Nor do they hold this perception of themselves. The same holds for teachers in the public schools. Research and evaluation are simply left to university faculties, testing experts, or merely to the dictates of the standardized testing process which various agencies mandate upon a school, regardless of anything that is happening within that building. The creative talents of school administrators and that of their teachers do not get together in the arena of educational research.

Traditionally, and contemporarily, the school is not a research institution. The responsibilities of the teacher differ from those of the classical meaning of the "term" researcher. This makes any discussion of research in public schools somewhat difficult and argumentative. Though this should not be the case.

The school administrator views research with mixed emotions. On the one hand, he or she hopes that research will provide security; he or she desparately needs to know whether what one is doing is "right" that a particular administrative decision or curriculum approach is not only approved in theory and experience, but is somehow scientifically verifiable. On the other hand, he or she is confused by conflicting results and is soon convinced that partial truths are mystifying than total ignorance.

Is there then a role to be performed by the school administrator. I submit there is. As a reseacher, well, yes to a small degree. But to an even greater degree is that of a facilitator, stimulator or team leader for school based research. I shall address my remarks to the school administrator's role as a facilitator or stimulator of the school's environment in which the research is to be conducted. I shall purposefully not be concerned in these remarks with the various methodological approaches and barriers to conducting action research.

ROLES AND/OR FUNCTIONS OF THE EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

1) Take the initiative in getting local school personnel and board members to see the possible value of educational research. In terms of teachers the school administrator must place research in its proper perspective -- as a useful tool that can be beneficial but is not the answer to everything. He must as the term leader help them realize that research fundings are not absolute, but simply the results of a particular research effort conducted under special conditions with certain inherent limitations.

2) The school administrator could lead the fight for the earmarking of research monies by school boards.

   The school board is rare that earmarks even one-tenth of one percent of its annual budget for research on instructions, learning, materials development and filed testing.

Admittedly some of the larger school systems have a Bureau of research, but these are confined primarily to the gathering and reporting of standardized test data, studying enrollment trends, collecting partial bits of follow-up information, and writing proposals for training or curriculum and instructional designs or strategies.

Traditionally school boards have operated on the assumption that their functions are primarily to hire qualified school personnel, they have not tended to view research and development as part of their responsibility; rather, they have viewed the schools with a consumer perspective instead of producers of knowledge and information through the testing of new methods and materials. Yet, hundreds of thousands of dollars ride on board decisions as to whether to implement a new reading program; invest in the extremely expensive curriculum package, experience equipment and consumable materials; and purchase a new math training program. Where are the research data? Who is to be relied upon to furnish the correct information as to the efficacy of these developments?

3) Encourage and assist local boards of education to provide release time for teachers to become actively engaged in meaningful research.

4) Facilitate collaboration between college and the public school faculty. In a number of instances (too few I'm afraid) some exciting and significant research has resulted from the collaborative approach. William Hedges in an article entitled: Research and the Secondary School Teacher said: "True team research recognizes and allows for a diversity of input with the rewards going proportionately to all the team members. Also, with the inclusion of the teacher as a peer, the likelihood is increased that the research will not only still be based on theory, but will be truly residual in the real world of the classroom."

5) Encourage and assist public school teachers via in-service workshops in becoming more knowledgeable in research methodology or philosophy in relation to some of their day-to-day classroom problems or concerns.

6) Possibly, the most important function of the school administrator is to bring about the reality of research within the organizational life breath of the school. Since the role of teachers is perceived by parents (and other educators) as that of an "instructor" whose accountability rests on "getting the material across:" and others of different persuasions with varying agendas still see the role differently -- from a negotiator to a counselor. And school administrators, well, they're the keepers and managers of the building, or the school's authoritative symbol.

Now, what all this means is simply, to paraphrase a statement made by Anthony Polemeni in an article on Research and Teacher Power, that the school administrator and teacher as researchers are nowhere in the perceptual framework.

Maybe it is unrealistic to expect people to feel an obligation to do what they are neither trained for nor paid to do.

I believe the administrative heirarchy can be constructed to meet the practical everyday needs of research and development at the public school level. It goes without saying that such optimism is based on the assumption that Boards of Education will begin to re-examine their role in Research and Demonstration and make available greater sums of monies for needed research in the public schools.

I believe that the school administrator's ultimate task in school based research is to stimulate and guide the growth of research, development and evaluation within school buildings with whatever organizational structure he or she perceives to be sound and workable.

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